



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

OPERATION “OPEN WATER” NETS 14 INDIVIDUALS WHO ILLEGALLY ENTERED AND WORKED IN THE PORT OF TAMPA

TAMPA, FLA. – Paul I. Perez, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, Steven J Trent, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Frank Cioffi, Resident Agent-in-Charge, Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General (SSA-OIG), Lance Newman, Special Agent-in-Charge, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), today announced the unsealing of indictments and the arrest of 14 individuals on charges that include social security fraud, possession of counterfeit alien registration card, and unlawful re-entry following deportation.

This has been a yearlong investigation that culminated early today as federal, state, and local law enforcement began rounding up those individuals indicted.

To maintain security, all individuals employed at or entering the Port of Tampa must have a Port Access Badge. Prior to receiving a Port Access Badge, individuals must complete an application. The application requires the individual to certify that his or her name and date of birth (DOB), Social Security Number (SSN), and other biographical information in correct.

On a yearly basis, Port Access Badge-holders must renew their Port Access Badge by completing a new application and submitting fingerprints. This information is reviewed and compared to SSA, ICE, and FDLE records. This screening process is conducted to identify individuals who provide inconsistent or false information during the application and security background process.

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the United States Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security have placed a priority on protecting our nation’s infrastructure. There is no reason to believe that any of the individuals indicted were involved in or planning any terrorist activity.

“This is the latest effort in our ongoing commitment to work with local, state, and federal law enforcement in keeping our transportation facilities safe,” stated U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez. “We will remain vigilant in limiting access to those facilities that are potential targets of terrorism. This

investigation sends a clear signal that we are checking and double checking those who enter these secured areas.”

According to Steven J Trent, Special Agent-in-Charge of ICE in Tampa, “This is not a time when we can let our guard down and allow illegal aliens to work in critical infrastructure areas in this country.”

Guy Tunnell, FDLE Commissioner, stated, “By using the investigative resources of the Tampa Bay Regional Domestic Security Task Force (RDSTF), we have been able to assure that the measures taken by the State of Florida to protect our Port have not been compromised. We will continue to address any issues that might compromise security at the Port of Tampa.”

This investigation was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General (OIG), U.S. Border Patrol, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), and the Tampa Port Authority Security. The Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office and the Tampa Police Department have also assisted in the investigation. These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Amanda Kaiser.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.